

THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Historians and Historical Societies

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AN ADDRESS

AT THE OPENING OF THE FENWAY BUILDING OF  
THE MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

APRIL 13, 1899

BY

CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS, LL.D.

PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY

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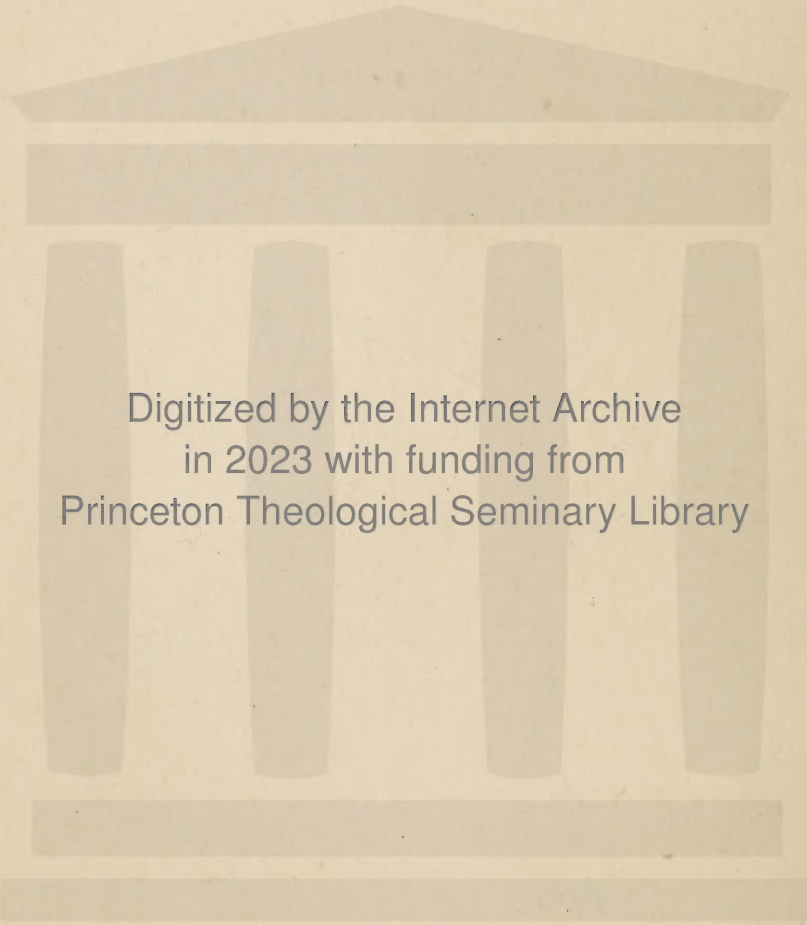
PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY

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# HISTORIANS

## AND

# HISTORICAL SOCIETIES.

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IN 1791, — eight years more than a century ago, — the site upon which this building stands was an indistinguishable portion of the “Roxbury flats,” as the region hereabouts had immemorially been called, — the neck-ward side of Boston’s Back Bay. It was a remote, unfrequented locality; while Court Street, as the ancient Queen Street of provincial times had three years before been renamed, was still a place of residence. On the 21st day of January, of that year, eight Boston gentlemen met by appointment in the house of one of their number, William Tudor, — the house then standing on the corner of Court Street and what was still known as Prison Lane, now Court Square, — the present familiar site of the northerly portion of Young’s Hotel. Four of the eight were ministers, — divines of the provincial period: all were men of middle life, the oldest, James Sullivan, being in his forty-eighth year, while Thomas Wallcut, the youngest, was only thirty-three. The constitution of Massachusetts had at that time been adopted only ten years before. John Hancock was, for the eighth time, Governor of the Commonwealth; it was but the second year of the first administration of Washington. The eight gentlemen, all born British subjects and only recently become citizens of the young republic, had met for the purpose of forming an historical society, — certainly the first organization of its kind in America, possibly the first in the world. They called it simply “The Historical Society,” a name which, three years later, when a formal act of incorporation was obtained from the Legislature, became “The Massachusetts Historical Society,” — the name the organization has ever since borne, and now inscribed over the entrance to this, its third building and sixth abiding-place.

As one thinks of those eight gentlemen gathered in the parlor of the Court Street dwelling on that January day, 1791, and the purpose for which they were there met, one of the great rhetorical passages of English literature suggests itself, especially to an American, — Burke's much quoted vision of Lord Bathurst, — then, it may be added, not yet become a classic, seeing that it was uttered only fifteen years before, and Burke was still living, a man of sixty-two. In that memorable passage, you will recall, Burke pictures to the House of Commons an angel as drawing aside from before the eyes of him whom he describes as "the auspicious youth," the curtain which veils futurity, and revealing the wonders he was destined to see. Had the Genius of History, invoked that day in the comfortable, four-square Boston dwelling by those eight gentlemen, — four of them divines of the earlier Massachusetts stock, — raised for them in like manner that curtain veiling futurity, it is curious to reflect on the range of feelings he would have excited, — astonishment, wonder, admiration, disgust, apprehension, fear. Their future is our past; what they would have apprehended darkly we have seen face to face. Let us look at it for a moment, if we can, through their eyes, and in Edmund Burke's mirror.

The angel of Lord Bathurst, you remember, enhanced the rising glories and commercial grandeur of England, by first unfolding bright and happy scenes of household prosperity and domestic honor; then, presently, pointing out in the larger and grander panorama which gradually opened, a little speck, scarce visible in the mass of national interest, a small seminal principle rather than a formed body, he went on: "Young man, there is America, — which at this day [1704] serves for little more than to amuse you with stories of savage men and uncouth manners, yet shall, before you taste of death, show itself equal to the whole of that commerce which now attracts the envy of the world. Whatever England has been growing to by a progressive increase of improvement, brought in by varieties of people, by succession of civilized conquests and civilizing settlements in a series of seventeen hundred years, you shall see as much added to her by America in a single life!"

Burke, I am well enough aware, is a dangerous spirit to invoke. His imagination and his rhetoric suggest a standard

with which no one cares to challenge comparison; nor is it altogether easy to drop at once from his lofty sustained expression to our simpler modes of speech. I will try to do so. When the founders met, the town of Boston numbered, it is supposed, some 20,000 inhabitants; and its original topography, as well as its forms of political life, were almost unimpaired, — the town-meeting and its board of selectmen still ruling the little peninsula, which a single bridge only connected with the mainland. Physically it was thus in all essential respects the Tri-mount on which one hundred and sixty years before Winthrop found Blackstone dwelling, — a hermit in a wilderness. Intellectually, and politically even, it did not greatly differ from the Boston of Cotton Mather, Zabdiel Boylston and Samuel Sewall, — the Boston in which Franklin was born and Samuel Adams agitated, — the same Boston whose affairs Thomas Hutchinson administered so well. But one physical aspect of the Boston and its immediate vicinity of 1791 has peculiar interest for us here now and on this occasion. The Common, an unenclosed pasture stretching down to the easterly beach of the Back Bay, was on the outskirts of the town; and beyond it lay a broad tidal estuary, fringed by reaches of salt marsh through which creeks and channels wound a sinuous way, along whose edges, the haunt and the home of curlew and wild fowl, the eel and the bivalve, tall sedge grass waved. The single traditional road, with rude structures here and there along its sides, still led from near the foot of the Common, across the Neck, to the neighboring town of Roxbury; and this building stands on an extension of what was then known as Frog Lane, within the limits of Roxbury, and in the midst of what would have seemed to those eight gentlemen in Court Street a dreamy exhalation from the familiar “Flats.”

Such was the situation in the fast-aging eighteenth century. The nineteenth has now already drawn yet nearer to its close. Now imagine the Genius of History raising, that January day, the curtain which covered futurity from before the eyes of our founders, as Burke’s angel raised it before those of Bathurst. The thought, even at this time, suggests a shiver. What, it might almost be asked, did not that century, then about to begin, now closing, have in store, — what ingredient for surprise, whether that of admiration or of horror? Pursuing the

course suggested by Burke, the eyes of the founders would first have rested on scenes of domestic honor and prosperity not less alluring than those which would have made glad the heart of young Bathurst. True, in the Boston of to-day the founders would have sought in vain to recognize some familiar feature of their home. Its very profile is changed; for two of Trimount's three hills are gone. If they looked long enough, and with a scrutiny sufficiently close, they might, among the towering monuments of modern trade, detect a few familiar buildings, — King's Chapel, their State House, the "Old South," Faneuil Hall; but Boston, reaching out over its busy thoroughfares to one half the points of the compass, — Boston, absorbing adjacent territory, creating new territory, would have ceased to be a peninsula, while in what they knew as the Back Bay marshes, — now dotted with trees and shrubbery, and become a region of watercourses, driveways and parks, — in this by them least-suspected quarter would be pointed out the home of the Society they had that day met to create.

It was at this stage in the vision that the angel called Bathurst's attention to America, — the scarcely visible speck — the "seminal principle rather than a formed body." History, not territory, was the domain our founders were gathered there to enter upon. And it would seem as if it could not have been without a gleam of Satanic mischief in his face that the genius of the occasion now unrolled the record of those then living or but lately dead, who, tested by the coming century's judgment, had by their writings most contributed to historic thought and historic methods; for it is not easy, though it assuredly verges on the ludicrous, to imagine the dismay with which those four divines at least would have read, blazoned on the roll in letters of a resplendency which obscured and even obliterated the rest, the names of Gibbon and Voltaire. Voltaire, the scoffing French infidel, — at once the loathing and the terror of the orthodox; — Gibbon, the free-thinker, whose history its president was that very year about publicly to announce, was not tolerated as part of the curriculum of the neighboring university. Mil-lot's "Elements," whatever that may be, was, as a text-book, preferred, while "Gibbon's history was never thought of."

And from this point forward it is greatly to be feared the heretofore beneficent Genius would have assumed an ever-

increasing Mephistophelian aspect in the eyes of those newly emancipated colonists, — the eight historical Fausts of Boston, — while the vision would have become altogether painful in its interest and its surprises. Again it changed. And now the very foundations, the accepted primal facts, the basic syenite, as it were, not only of human history but of religious belief, one by one crumbled away, and Adam, even, had not waked and walked in Eden. No longer descended from angels, man had been evolved from an ape. And worse yet was to come; a world in which the principles of historical criticism, applied to the books of Herodotus, were also applied to those of Moses; and, in no irreverent spirit be it said, the Saviour even was discussed and weighed as a young Jewish philosopher, — the son of a Nazarene carpenter. They little dreamed it, those eight gentlemen, — for at best they were not of the imaginative kind; though, for that matter, had they been of imagination all compact, they would hardly have dreamed it the more, — they little dreamed that the world, their world, even then stood on the very brink of the French revolution, — that chasm yawning between the centuries.

But it is time to have done with Burke and with visions, and come to the matter in hand. Hard upon sixty years have now elapsed since Thomas Wallcut, the last survivor of that little party of 1791, was borne to his grave. The life of the Society they organized includes within a mere span the entire development of modern historical processes and philosophy; and it is at worst not more than a pardonable exaggeration to say that our organization goes back to the movement which, as respects historical method, thought and expression, was the equivalent of that other movement of two centuries before in art and letters, which we call the Renaissance. Of the later movement our Society has been a part. It has in a greater or less degree sympathized in its spirit; sooner or later, it has accepted its results. That spirit and those results are the theme for to-day; and, in measuring what has been already accomplished, I shall endeavor in some degree to forecast what remains immediately to be done: for in the great process of evolution the last step ever leads to the next. There is no finality in results.

The lines along which the process of thought and study

directed to history were in future to be pursued had already, in 1791, assumed definite shape. Coming at once to the concrete, our fathers — and by the phrase “our fathers” in this connection I refer to the generation which intervened between us and the founders — looked upon Hume, Robertson and Gibbon as the three great modern historians, — that incomparable English triumvirate through whose example and precepts the classic traditions had been revived. No better method of reaching a correct understanding of the progress up to this time made in what we would fain believe to be the science of history can, therefore, be devised, than by taking these three writers as a landmark, — a starting-point, as it were, — to estimate their work from the standpoint we occupy. It is only necessary further to premise that they all antedate our Society; for, though Robertson and Gibbon did not die until 1793 and 1794, their work had in 1791 been done. The publication of Hume’s history, begun in 1754, was completed in 1761; Robertson’s *Charles V.*, on which his reputation to-day mainly rests, appeared in 1769; while the first volume of “*The Decline and Fall*,” which included the famous fifteenth and sixteenth chapters, came out in 1776, and the last volume in 1788. Between the publication of the earliest English historical work of the modern school and the organization of this Society, thirty-six years had, therefore, elapsed.

Looking back through the perspective of an additional century, there can be no manner of question that those histories marked, for the years between 1750 and 1790, a distinct step in advance. Through them historical work was at last differentiated from other literary pursuits, and the day was forever gone when polite and elegant writers of the Goldsmith and Smollett type could make a living from booksellers by alternating a history of Greece with one of *Animated Nature*, a history of Rome with a comedy or a novel, and a history of England with a poem, a volume of essays, or a book of travels. From that time forth historians were to constitute a class by themselves. Accordingly, all other historical writers in the English tongue before 1791 may, in comparison with these three, — Hume, Robertson and Gibbon, — be dismissed from consideration. These three were workers, though not the first workers, in a new field; for Bossuet, Condorcet, Montesquieu and Voltaire had, though in another tongue, already preceded

them. The difficulty with their method, briefly stated, was that in it history was divorced from philosophy. They had not, so to speak, picked up the true scent, and they coursed wildly. But nowhere have I found this subject treated with such learning and subtle insight as in Leslie Stephen's "History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century"; and, as what I have to say of these writers is, to use an architectural expression, the motive of my discourse, I propose to use Mr. Stephen's work freely, adopting his conclusions and, at times, even his language as my own. Speaking then of the histories of the triumvirate, he says they "have a common weakness, though Gibbon's profound knowledge has enabled his great work to survive the more flimsy productions of his colleagues. The fault, briefly stated, seems to be an incapacity to recognize the great forces by which history is moulded, and the continuity which gives to it a real unity. We have but a superficial view, — a superficiality, in the cases of Hume and Robertson, implying inadequate research; and both in their place and Gibbon's implying a complete acquiescence in the external aspects of events, and the accidental links of connection, without any attempt to penetrate to the underlying and ultimately determining conditions." This defect was, however, the inevitable result and concomitant of the stage to which human knowledge had then advanced; and it mattered little if at all whether any particular historical problem was approached from the rationalistic or the theological point of view, infidel or catholic, by Bossuet or Voltaire, by Warburton or Hume, the result was the same; and, in the absence of a more correct philosophy of the universe, the globe and mankind, it had of necessity to be the same. If Bossuet or Warburton took up the theme, a Divine Agency, working through Special Providences and in ways unknown and unknowable to man, set sequence at defiance; if Hume or Voltaire tried their hands at the problem, their formula was that, in the range of possibilities, "anything may be the cause of anything else," and combinations, in reality, as we have since come to see, quite superficial and of only passing influence, — mere disturbing factors, like comets among heavenly bodies, — might produce results entirely incommensurate with their apparent importance; — what in the one case was the volition of an irresponsible deity became in the other a contingency of

chance. Thus the slightest accidents might change, not only a dynasty or a form of government, but the whole social constitution or the beliefs of the human race. In other words, from Bossuet to Voltaire and from Warburton to Gibbon these attempts at history, however learned or pious, witty or astute, were but the first crude interrogations of human experience, and in this field, as in geology, chemistry and biology, revealed only varieties of external conformation, without exhibiting the governing forces which mould the internal constitution. So completely, indeed, did those writers fail to appreciate the unseen and the deep-seated, whether influences or tendencies, and, consequently, what we regard as the philosophy of human development, — that, as the result of their historical studies, Hume, on the verge of the French revolution, set down representative government as a mere passing stage of disturbance, and pictured the despotism of the Bourbons as the Euthanasia of the British constitution; while Gibbon fixed upon the incipient decadence of the age of the Antonines as that period of the world's history in which an intelligent man, endowed with the power of choice, would most have wished his lot to have been cast.

But a simile may here be of use. So far as true historical methods are concerned, the situation during the second half of the last century is suggestive of the meet and the hunting field; — the pack was there, — the dogs, good, bad and indifferent, were sniffing and yelping, crossing and recrossing each other's tracks, now and again starting off in some wrong direction and on a false cry, but ever circling to better purpose, and hot on the chase; then, suddenly, a deep-voiced call is heard, some animal more sagacious or more experienced or with keener senses than the rest has struck the true scent, and raised the cry, — the game's afoot, and at once serious work begins, the whole hunt swinging into line behind the baying hounds. When, however, it comes to extorting its great secrets from reluctant nature, the true scent is not easily or quickly found; it is no morning fox-hunt or day's rapid run: but the process is tentative and slow, and, even when at last the problem is solved, its solution is apt to come indirectly and in some unanticipated way. It was so in the case of history.

During the last half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth, it was with thought and the historical

methods as with maritime discovery three centuries before ; the world was fast ripening for the great discoverer and his great discovery. The human mind was steadily and persistently groping its way. The “*Esprit des Lois*” was published in 1750, and Montesquieu has been pronounced by authority than which I know none higher the founder of the modern historical method. The same year also Turgot read to the Sorbonne his discourse on the “*Successive Advances of the Human Mind*” ; and, only six years later, in 1756, Voltaire’s “*Essai sur les Mœurs*” appeared, the first disclosing, by a flash of thought almost prophetic, the future philosophy of history, while the last applied to historical evidence the true critical spirit. At almost the same time in England great investigators, — men far greater than Robertson, greater than Hume in other respects, if not greater in his special line of inquiry, — men as great even as Gibbon, were patiently feeling after the true historical method, and results of the first importance were obtained in one direction by Adam Smith, and in another by Burke.

This Society was, however, destined to have passed by several years its first semi-centennial, and two whole generations of mankind had, since 1791, been gathered to their fathers, before the riddle was rightly read, and the true scent struck. Even then the riddle was read on another page of the book, and the scent struck in a field close to that of history, but not history itself. On the 1st day of October, 1859, a few months only less than forty years ago, a book, essentially scientific and yet not beyond easy popular comprehension, was quietly published, entitled “*The Origin of Species*” ; and from that first day of October, 1859, a new epoch in the study of history dates.<sup>1</sup> The true scent was struck, — the long-threatened,

<sup>1</sup> While these pages were passing through the press I chanced upon a more scientific statement of the influence exercised by Darwin on historical thought and methods. It is in J. M. Robertson’s “*Buckle and his Critics*” (1895, pp. 14, 15) : “ [Buckle] wrote, it must always be remembered, before Darwin published the ‘*Origin of Species*.’ Now, in logical course, a complete grasp of law in social life can only be conceived as following on a grasp of law in animal life. During three hundred years, step after step has been taken by educated Europe towards a completely scientific view of the cosmos ; and each step in turn has been vehemently resisted by religious feeling, which specially embodies the principle of fixation in ideas. The Copernican astronomy and the Newtonian physics were in their day of propaganda utterly repugnant to prevailing opinion. When, after generations of confused progress, they had been assimilated by

the fiercely assailed Mosaic cosmogony, including its origin of man, with all that it implied of celestial or providential interference in his process of development, was displaced, and relegated, though with no unreverential touch, to its final resting-place. It now stands there side by side with the Ptolemaic astronomy, among those great discarded theories, the stepping-stones on which man has slowly risen through error to truth,—out of darkness into light.

Since then what had before seemed chaos has become order and law. No longer descended from angels,—a son fallen from grace,—the race of man upon earth has become, like other kindred developments, matter for classification and systematic study. Before, he was the plaything of fate, when he was not either favored or frowned upon through those supernatural interferences the last faint suggestions of which as agencies in the outcome of human affairs have not yet ceased to be heard; for within half a century a grave historian of our own land has not been ashamed to refer to a fog, which opportunely covered from sight certain military operations, as “providential,” just as the artists of two centuries earlier portrayed in their frescos the forces of Heaven contending on the side of the Cross. It is safe, however, now to say that before many more years have elapsed unmeaning language of this sort will be as much out of date, and sound as curiously, as the old folk-lore talk, once taken seriously enough, of gnomes, genii and fairies. Already men and human events are studied as the logical outcome of a long and complicated natural process in which the two leading factors are environment and continuity, and the result, evolution. Under this new impetus the historical conception and historical methods have undergone rapid and noticeable changes. Human history has become part of a comprehensible cosmogony, and its area vastly extended. No longer a mere

orthodoxy, there was little resistance — save that of professional routine — to a scientific treatment of chemistry, since that dealt with a set of ideas altogether outside ordinary religious thinking; but the scientific method in geology was angrily resented, because that plainly clashed with the theological habit of thought and speech, as well as with the sacred books. And scarcely had the educated world adjusted itself to geology as unquestionable science, when Buckle came forward with his challenge on the field of social history; while just on his heels came Darwin, with the biology that horrified a sanhedrim which had supposed itself settled for life in an incomplete geology.”

succession of traditions and annals, it is closely allied to astronomy, geology, biology; and the rise and fall of dynasties are merely episodes and phases of a continuous whole, — that whole being the slow development of man and his institutions from the family to the clan, and from the clan to the nation, — from the kraal to the cathedral-town. From this has followed another corollary of deepest significance; both history and biography, for “great men are the guide-posts and landmarks in the State,” and so biography is but another form of history, ceased to be mere narratives of more or less dramatic possibilities, episodes which lent themselves to the purpose of the word-painter, the literary artist, of hardly more significance than a novel, and meant only to amuse, or, at most, to instruct, — losing this characteristic, they assumed a deeper significance. They acquired a scientific value. Each life, each episode, each epoch fell into its place as part of a consecutive whole, and became of import only as it was shown to bear on, and in some way contribute to, that whole, — the development of man from what he once was to what he now is. Take for an instance our own particular field, the vineyard peculiar to us.

Ours is the Massachusetts Historical Society. In a sense, all history is our province, as all knowledge was Bacon’s, for the history of Massachusetts is of value not merely as a story of adventure and settlement, slow growth and dramatic action, something in itself curious, individual and interesting, if only well and skilfully told, matter for a romance, an oration, or a poem; in this aspect it has, indeed, its use for the literary artist, as Hawthorne long since showed, but for the scientific modern historical investigator all that is mere surplusage, — a tale of little meaning; the true significance of the history of Massachusetts, like that of every other community, whether Holland or Caffreland, lies in its place in the whole, — in its contribution to the sum of human possessions, its part in the slow process of human evolution. Is mankind richer or better, nearer the ultimate goal, — whatever or wherever that may be, — because of it; and, if so, why or how? If such is the case, and in just so far as it is the case, the record of Massachusetts, as of any other community, is worthy of, and will repay, careful study and scientific analysis; beyond that, it is of no historic value.

The answer to this question is obviously to us matter of moment, — for it involves nothing less than a justification, or otherwise, of our being. After all, have we a right to be here? And that for us important preliminary question, also, I propose now to discuss for a moment. A mere incident, the discussion may furnish an illustration of my general proposition relative to the history of our day as contrasted with history as it was understood in the day of our founders. On this point I am already on record.<sup>1</sup> I have long held that the history of Massachusetts is the history of the gradual and practical development of certain social and political truths of the first and most far-reaching importance; that the passage of the Red Sea was, from this point of view, not a more momentous event than the voyage of the Mayflower, and that the founding of Boston was fraught with consequences hardly less important than those which resulted from the founding of Rome. But I am a prejudiced witness; and such utterances coming from the President of this Society on this occasion might be set down as an exaggeration, — under the circumstances pardonable perhaps, but not the less to be taken with more than the customary grain of allowance. I propose, therefore, to cite corroborative testimony, — testimony also which no one will be disposed lightly to set aside as lacking weight in the scientific scale. I have already referred to one of Mr. Darwin's works as marking in its publication a dividing line in the methods of historical research; and I now quote these words from another work of Mr. Darwin's published twelve years after the "Origin of Species." He there wrote: "Looking to the distant future, I do not think that the Rev. Mr. Zincke takes an exaggerated view when he says: 'All other series of events — as that which resulted in the culture of mind in Greece, and that which resulted in the empire of Rome — only appear to have purpose and value when viewed in connection with, or rather as subsidiary to . . . the great stream of Anglo-Saxon emigration to the West.'"<sup>2</sup> The reference here is not, you will observe, to the discovery of Columbus or to the settlement of America, but "to the great stream of Anglo-Saxon emigration," — in other words, the voyage of the "Mayflower" and the foundation of Boston.

<sup>1</sup> Massachusetts, its Historians and its History, pp. 9, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Descent of Man, vol. i. pp. 218, 219.

Further corroborative evidence of my original proposition would be superfluous.

What, then, are the contributions of Massachusetts towards the evolution of man? I hold them to be, not certain settlements in the wilderness, and a greater or less number of life and death struggles with savage aborigines, — not conflicts on land and sea, — not even the spirit of adventure and gain which Burke has immortalized in that well-known passage which in literary splendor equals his vision of Bathurst; — I pass over, too, the memorable agitation which culminated in that most dramatic episode, the Confederate Rebellion, our Great Civil War; — all these are mere episodes, the material out of which history is made tempting to the so-called general reader. The contributions of Massachusetts towards the evolution of mankind are, as I see it, of quite another character and three in number; or, perhaps, I might better say, one only great contribution, with two corollaries therefrom. The one great contribution is the establishment of the principle of the equality of man before the law; and the institutions corollary thereto, and essential to it as practical working machinery, are the town-meeting and the common school, — the Citizens' Parliament and the Peoples' University. Herein, as I take it, is the distilled and concentrated essence of the history of Massachusetts, — here the justification of our existence as a Society.

But I cannot linger to discuss this thesis further here, and defend my claim on behalf of our Commonwealth and our Society from possible assault. The significance of the contribution may not be understood; or it may well be the validity of our Massachusetts letters patent of discovery in all and each of these fields will be denied; or our agency in human development minimized in favor of others. I must pass on to the wider field. History then, I will briefly say, is a many-sided subject, and during long periods, stretching sometimes to the millennial, one result, or phase rather, of development, essential to the process of unending evolution, will, so to speak, hold the stage. It is the scene in that act of the drama, — the matter then to be passed upon and settled. It is a great mistake also to assume that progress is the law; that the world is always and everywhere growing gradually better, as it grows older. Optimistic and pleasant, this theory may also be Christian to a degree; but, unfortunately, it is

not true. On the contrary, progress is the rare exception: races may remain in the lowest barbarism, or their development be arrested at some more advanced stage during periods far surpassing that of recorded history; actual decay may alternate with progress, and even true progress implies some admixture of decay. Great forces work slowly; and it is only after many disturbances and long-continued oscillations that the world is moved from one position to another. Mankind, in the higher as in the lower stages of development, though more in the lower than in the higher, resents nothing so much as the intrusion upon them of a new and disturbing truth. The huge dead-weight of stupidity and indolence is always ready to smother audacious inquiries. Thus looking back over forty centuries, we find that, though countless nations have been in existence in every possible phase of development, struggling in advance or retrogression, all contributing something, could we only find it out, of value or significance in the grand result,—whether hint of encouragement, or warning of danger,—yet, during all that long period,—practically the whole of recorded history,—the upward destiny of mankind has rested in the hands of some half-dozen races or nations;—so few indeed are they, that they can be numbered on the fingers, those people incarnate with an idea. Let us enumerate them; so doing will not take long: the Assyrians, with astronomy, the dawn of science, and the written symbol, the origin of letters; the Egyptian, with mechanics and internal improvements; the Israelite, with poetry, history and the one God; the Greek, with art, letters and philosophy; the Roman, with organization and empire; the Papacy, with spiritual dominion; the Englishman, with colonization and representative government; the American, with equality before the law and democracy;—eight nationalities in all, from the dawn of history to the present day, and each one of the eight carrying that species of development for which the race somehow possessed a special, so to speak an inborn, aptitude to heights of perfection never attained before; and, in so far, extending the permanent dominion of mankind. Not for an instant be it suggested that other races or nations had not achieved results in the same lines, at the same or even at earlier times; merely these were in their particular fields supreme. They had the scientific

equivalent, whatever that may be, of the old theological "mission."

Furthermore, under the influence of some law of evolution the nature and operation of which is not yet fully understood, each period of development seems to present some particular phase, the essential battle-ground as it were of progress at the stage it has then reached. It assumes different issues in different countries, and the conflict is sometimes secular in duration; but the central thought is always there, and, soon or late, directly or indirectly, the progress of events works back to it. This particular phase, this central force or thought, this all-subordinating issue has, I submit, for the last four centuries been religious and political liberty. This, so far as mankind is concerned, is the last stage reached in that slow process which began when man first became an articulating and tool-using animal, and the end and result of which is the great enigma; —

"For the drift of the Maker is dark, an Isis hid by the veil."

But it is with the period antecedent to the now that history has to deal, and the value of any scrap or bit, be it more or less, comes from its proper placing in the entire scheme, and its accurate adaptation to the whole design as, so far, worked out. Thus it has been said of the poet Browning that he wrought "with the searching and unerring power of mind to which the one thing of importance is, 'What is the value of this character or incident in the history of human progress or reaction?'"<sup>1</sup>

Why is not this a concise, fair statement, from an unexpected quarter, of the crucial question every modern historian or biographer must put to himself, and answer, if he proposes to do really valuable and philosophical work: Where and how does his particular subject — be it a nation, be it a period, be it an incident, or be it a man — fit into the general scheme of human evolution, and contribute to the grand result? In so far as it does this it is of philosophic historical value, — like a geological study, or observations in botany or biology; in so far as it fails to do this, it may be a charming literary production, an absorbing narrative, a vivid picture of life, manners or adventure, or it may be a mere book of annals as

<sup>1</sup> Robert Browning, "Essays and Thoughts," by J. T. Nettlehip, p. 284.

faithful as it is tiresome ; but history, in the modern sense, it is not.

For instance, taking the field of biography in which to seek for illustrations, the two most interesting men of the last hundred years as I see them, — the two whose work was most far-reaching in its connection with what went before and is to come after, were Charles Darwin and Napoleon Bonaparte, — men so different and so wholly dissimilar that the mere mention of their names in the same connection cannot but cause surprise, and, perhaps, a sense even of amusement ; — the one a quiet, unassuming English naturalist and observer ; the other a noisy, self-assertive Corsican military adventurer. Their work and the results they brought about may be considered in either of two ways, — as that of individuals, or in connection with their environment and the great sequence of human evolution. Regarded from the first point of view, no comparison can be made between them ; the life of Darwin was devoid of incident, that of Napoleon full of dramatic action. Viewed, however, in connection with man's development, Darwin's place is the more interesting of the two, for it takes us straight back to the Pharaohs. Napoleon, after all, was but a blind iconoclast, — a tremendous instrument of far-reaching change under the conditions of his being. To understand him and to appreciate the work wrought through him, it is necessary to understand the history of Europe and eastern civilization during the four centuries which preceded. They made him possible, and gave him his significance. He is a bit, and a central bit, in the mosaic. Darwin also was a bit, but the historical mosaic of which he is a part covers thirty centuries ; for the figure next opposed to him, and to be studied in connection with him, was an Israelite poet, soldier, law-giver and philosopher, — the one man who had dared to say he saw God. To understand Darwin and the conditions which made Darwin possible, — which prevented his being burnt or crucified, or, what is more probable, which caused his teachings not to pass by as mere idle words, — it is necessary to assign him his exact place in the scheme of development, and to view him in his connection with that scheme. It is impossible to understand Darwin, and Darwin's English world, without continually bearing in mind Moses and that Hebrew philosophy, hoary with its three thousand years of antiquity, with which

the English naturalist came in such impressive contact. Darwin confronted Moses. Whatever comes between is one great sequence, one immense continuity ; so the sequence is of yesterday and the continuity small in the case of Napoleon compared with what they were in the case of that other.

One more example ; and this time brought not from biography, but from history. I have referred to the place Massachusetts holds in the general scheme. Were I asked what I considered the most interesting and dramatic episode in modern development, I should reply at once the great sixteenth-century grapple between Spain and Holland, when, as middle-age feudalism went down and modern nationalism arose, Philip the Second and William of Orange stood forth typifying in thought and method and action the two opposing forces, — the reactionary and the progressive. You cannot study or write the history of Massachusetts intelligently without bearing that struggle continually in mind. It is the key to all which makes the long subsequent experience here valuable, and gives it its correct place and significance in the grand result, — the States of Holland, the Commonwealth of England, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts ; William of Orange, Oliver Cromwell, John Winthrop. The idea of the rights of man — civil liberty, religious liberty — for which William of Orange fought single-handed, and against which Philip the Second struggled, with all the might of Rome and all the gold of America to aid him, was merely the earlier phase of that doctrine of the equality of man before the law which was its logical sequence under the conditions of our Massachusetts environment. Thus, whichever way you turn, the garment hangs together ; and, as the law of continuity asserts itself, one phase of evolution cannot be properly understood if the others are disregarded. But it is with history as it is with geology, — the science is still too young. Both are products of the century now closing.

This new and enlarged conception, once it forced its way into acceptance, could not but greatly modify the methods of historical treatment. It has already done so to a very considerable extent, and it is safe to predict it will do so still more as the generations of investigators succeed each other upon the stage and in this, the laboratory. Even now it is not risking much to assert that the day of the general historian of the old

school is over. Experience has demonstrated the utter impossibility of accomplishing satisfactory results in that way; the task set exceeds human individual capacity. Take, for instance, two familiar examples which at once suggest themselves, — Macaulay and Bancroft. Macaulay, in fact, though it is questionable whether he ever realized it, or, indeed, thought of it in that way, set for himself the task of dealing with one of the interesting, though minor, episodes or phases in the more recent stage of human evolution, — that is, the final organization of parliamentary, or representative, government as the outcome of the struggle which, at the date when his narrative opened, had been going on for two centuries. His plan was to trace the process of this phase of development until it assumed its catastrophic shape in the assembly of the States General of France in 1789. Whether designed or not, this was the scope and purpose of his task if properly subordinated to any general scheme in the philosophy of history. His first chapter begins with this well-remembered sentence — “I purpose to write the history of England from the accession of King James the Second down to a time which is within the memory of men still living”; in other words, he purposed to tell England’s story during a little more than a century, or from 1685 to 1789, for he could hardly have written the words I have quoted later than 1845. This period could be considered and treated either as a monograph contribution to a general scheme, or as a complete history in itself. Following the classic precedents, as well as the example of the great English historical triumvirate, Macaulay proceeded to treat it as a complete history in itself; and from the very necessities of the case, it resulted in neither a general history complete in itself nor in a monograph, but in a fragment, a superb historical torso. It was the same with Bancroft. He set out to write a history of the United States. The first volume he published in 1832; the last in 1882. Thus he devoted more than fifty years to his theme, — Gibbon devoted but twenty, — and when, because of increasing years, Bancroft’s pen fell from his hand, he had not yet got to the inauguration of Washington, nor had the United States come into its organized form. In other words, he failed to subordinate his work to any general scheme, or, consequently, to reduce it within reasonable proportions.

What, then, from the modern point of view is the object or value of histories of this sort, combining wide original research with a method of treatment at once general and detailed? What useful purpose do they serve? Are they meant to afford instruction and entertainment to what is known as the reading public? If so, they are much too long and ponderous. It was Macaulay's boast that he would make history so interesting that his volumes should displace the last novel from the young lady's work-table. And he did it; for Macaulay, whatever else he may or may not have been, was unquestionably the greatest and most fascinating of historical raconteurs. Let us regard his history, then, as a literary monument, a work designed for the reading public. As such, it was a great historical novel, and — in how many volumes? His fragment begins with 1665, and does not bring the year 1701 to an end. Under his method of treatment he allows on an average two hundred pages to a year; and he worked at a rate which produced about one volume in two years. Had he lived, therefore, to complete it, this literary monument — this unapproached, and we might add, this unapproachable historical fragment covering five years over a single century — would have filled a few more than thirty volumes, and, requiring sixty years for completion, would have furnished light and instructive reading for a lifetime. Many will recall Macaulay's own criticism under similar circumstances on the unfortunate Dr. Nares, and his "Life and Times of Burleigh." The bitter chalice is now returned to the reviewer's own lips. After numbering, measuring and weighing Dr. Nares's volumes, Macaulay concluded in these words: "Such a book might, before the deluge, have been considered as light reading by Hilpa and Shalum. But, unhappily, the life of man is now threescore years and ten; and we cannot but think it somewhat unfair in [a single author] to demand from us so large a portion of so short an existence."

It is the same with Bancroft, — he, too, lacks design, proportion and adaptation. His work is fragmentary; fits into no general scheme. It is neither literature nor history; for, as a literary narrative, the twelve volumes are too long; while, as history, containing as they do the stories of thirteen several colonies, every student and investigator knows that, if he wishes to be informed as to any particular person or

event, he seeks his information, not in the volumes of Bancroft, but in some monograph or history specially devoted to the place, the individual, or the subject in question. Each of these monumental works therefore necessarily lacks what can only be secured through a better considered process of differentiation. In them the attempt is made to combine at once, on a large scale, literary narrative with historical philosophy and indiscriminate detail. Accordingly, they are too long for a narrative, defective in philosophy, and incomplete, as well as probably inaccurate, in detail.

The same criticism may be passed on all the historians of the old school who were contemporaries with or followed the two I have named. Their methods were not adapted to the ends they had in view. Art is long, and life is fleeting; and the taste of the reading world changes. The modern man does not seem to have the patience, he certainly has not the leisure, of the former generations. It would be very interesting to know how many young persons now read Gibbon through as he was read by our fathers, or even by ourselves who grew up in "the fifties." Accurate information on such a point is not attainable; but in the case of one public library in a considerable Massachusetts city I have been led to conclude as the result of examination and somewhat careful inquiry, that the copy of the "Decline and Fall" on its shelves has, in over thirty years, not once been consecutively read through by a single individual. That it is bought as one of those "books no gentleman's library should be without," I know, not only from personal acquaintance with many such, but because new editions from time to time appear, and the book-sellers always have it "in stock"; that it is dipped into here and there, and more or less, I do not doubt; but that it is now largely or systematically read by young people of the coming generation, I greatly question.

In history, as in every other branch of study, specialization is the rule of the day. It may have been conceivable for Lord Bacon to take all knowledge to be his province at a time when the whole legal lore of England could, it is asserted, have been loaded into one wheelbarrow; but were a modern Lord Bacon to proclaim such a purpose, the announcement would excite ridicule, and very justly be accepted as conclusive evidence of that inordinate conceit which is the

not unusual concomitant of a defective intellectual make-up. But leaving Bacon's "all knowledge" out of the question, and confining ourselves to some one small province in the vast domain of history, a change simply amazing has taken place in the requirements of an historian since that memorable evening in October, 1764, when, as Gibbon sat musing amidst the ruins of Rome's capital, while the barefooted friars were singing vespers in the temple of Jupiter, the idea of writing the decline and fall of the city first started in his mind. Here again, however, I shall have recourse to our foreign associate already referred to; for this matter also he has treated, and treated it, I need scarcely add, with that combination of serious thought and quiet humor peculiarly his own, and which causes, in those doomed as I now am to follow him, a sense of pleased despair. In his last publication Mr. Stephen says:—

"A century or two ago we were content with histories after the fashion of Hume. In a couple of years he was apparently not only to write, but to accumulate the necessary knowledge for writing, a history stretching from the time of Julius Cæsar to the time of Henry VII. A historian who now does his work conscientiously has to take about the same time to narrate events as the events themselves occupied in happening. Innumerable sources of knowledge have been opened, and he will be regarded as superficial if he does not more or less avail himself of every conceivable means of information. He cannot be content simply with the old chroniclers or with the later writers who summarized them. Ancient charters, official records of legal proceedings, manor rolls, and the archives of towns have thrown light upon the underlying conditions of history. Local historians have unearthed curious facts, whose significance is only beginning to be perceived. Calendars of State papers enable us to trace the opinions of the great men who were most intimately concerned in the making of history. The despatches of ambassadors occupied in keenly watching contemporary events have been partly printed, and still lie in vast masses at Simancas and Venice and the Vatican. The Historical Manuscripts Commission has made known to us something of the vast stores of old letters and papers which had been accumulating dust in the libraries of old country mansions. When we go to the library of the British Museum, and look at the gigantic catalogue of printed books, and remember the huge mass of materials which can be inspected in the manuscript department, we—I can speak for myself at least—have a kind of nightmare sensation. A merciful veil of oblivion has no doubt covered a great deal. . . . It may be doubted whether this huge

accumulation of materials has been an unmixed benefit to history. Undoubtedly we know many things much more thoroughly than our ancestors. Still, in reading, for example, the later volumes of Macaulay or Froude, we feel sometimes that it is possible to have too much State-paper. The main outlines, which used to be the whole of history, are still the most important, and instead of being filled up and rendered more precise and vivid, they sometimes seem to disappear behind an elaborate account of what statesmen and diplomatists happened to think about them at the time — and, sometimes, what such persons thought implied a complete misconception of the real issues.”<sup>1</sup>

Yet, looked at from another point of view, it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that there are not many considerable branches of human knowledge concerning which the historian of the future must not in some degree inform himself. Somewhere and somehow his researches will touch upon them, remotely perhaps, but still as factors in his problem. Cicero, I believe, observes something of the same sort in regard to the great lawyer; but the modern philosophical historian, who undertakes to follow out through original research every line of investigation which enters into his theme, must go beyond this, — he too must take all knowledge to be his province. In the olden time history was supposed to relate merely to the superficial course of events; but now the historian finds himself forced to deal with underlying causes at once subtle, intricate and remote. What we have come to designate as sociology is a leading factor in the problem, and implies a whole network of externally converging conditions, each of which involves the study of a literature as well as, where it is possible, a close personal observation of facts and phenomena. Formerly all necessary information it was supposed could be acquired from books, — manuscripts were better yet, for those were, without any question, what are termed “original sources.” Yet the advantage in dealing with Roman military operations which Gibbon declared he had derived from a short militia experience, is one of the commonplaces of history; as he phrased it, “the captain of the Hampshire Grenadiers has not been useless to the historian of the Roman Empire.” Mr. Carl Schurz has spoken of the infinite aid it was to him in writing the Life of Henry Clay that he had himself served a term in the United States

<sup>1</sup> Studies of a Biographer, vol. i. pp. 8-10.

Senate. But, for the old-fashioned historian, all this was, and still is, beside the case. Rarely, if ever, hesitating, he flies boldly at every kind of game, — all are fish that come to his net. For instance, history is largely made up of accounts of operations and battles on land and on sea. Weary of threading his way through a long period of most unpicturesque peace, trying to make that interesting which was at best commonplace, the historian draws a breath of relief when at length he comes to a tumult of war; — here are pride, pomp and circumstance, — a chance for descriptive power. I once, in a very subordinate capacity, though for a considerable period of time, was brought into close contact with warfare, and saw much of military operations from within, or, as I may say, on the seamy side. Since then I have read in books of history, and other works more avowedly of fiction, many accounts of campaigns and battles; and, in so doing, I have been most deeply impressed with the audacity, not of soldiers, but of authors. Usually bookish men who had passed their lives in libraries, often clergymen, — knowing absolutely nothing of the principles of strategy or of the details of camp life and military organization, never having seen a column on the march, or a regiment in line, or heard a hostile shot, — not taking the trouble even to visit the scene of operations or to study its topography, wholly unacquainted with the national characteristics of the combatants, — these “bookish theoricks” substitute their imaginations for realities, and in the result display much the same real acquaintance with the subject which would be expected from a physician or an artist who undertook to treat of difficult problems in astronomy or mechanics. They are strongly suggestive of the good Dr. Goldsmith and his “Animated Nature.” Once or twice I have had occasion to follow these authorities, — authors of standard historical works, — and in so doing have familiarized myself with the topography of the scenes of action they described, and worked down as best I could into the characters of those in command, and what are known as the “original sources” of information as to their plans and the course of operations. The result has uniformly been a distinct accession of historical scepticism.

That among men of the closet and the historical laboratory are to be found military students of profound, detailed knowl-

edge and great critical acumen, no one would dispute; least of all we, with at least one brilliant and recognized exemplar in our own ranks, — a man who never saw an army in movement or a stricken field, and yet whom I once heard referred to, by one who had borne a part in fifty fights, the general then commanding our army, as the first among living military critics. I do not refer to the rare investigators of this character, when I say that I know of but one writer who has described military operations and battles, — those intricate movements of human pawns on a chess-board of much topographical uncertainty, and those scientific *mêlées* in which skill, luck, preparation, superiority of weapons, human endurance and racial characteristics decide the question of mastery as between two marshalled mobs, — I know, I was saying, of but one writer who has described battles and military operations in that realistic way which impresses me with a sense of both personal experience and literary skill. That one is Tolstoi, the Russian philosopher and novelist; his *Austerlitz* and Russian campaigns of Napoleon, and his *Sebastopol*, are masterpieces. A man of imagination and consummate literary capacity, he had himself served; and, curiously enough, in the same way, his compatriot, Verestchagin, has put upon canvas the sickening realism of war with a degree of force which could come only from familiarity with the cumbered field, and could by no possibility be worked up in the studio through the study of photographs, no matter how numerous, or the perusal of the accounts “from our special correspondents,” no matter how graphic and detailed.

But let me here illustrate from my own experience; and, to occasions such as this, nothing lends immediate interest, possibly value even, so much as a bit of personal reminiscence, — a paragraph, as it were, from an autobiography. As I have already mentioned, it was my fortune at one period to participate in a considerable number of battles, — among them none more famous, nor more fiercely contested, than *Antietam* and *Gettysburg*. The mere utterance of those names stirs the imagination, — visions arise at once of attack, repulse, hairbreadth escape, carnage and breathless suspense. There was, indeed, on those occasions enough and to spare of all these; but not, as it chanced, in my particular case. Some here will doubtless remember that English fox-hunting

squire, who has gained for himself a sort of immortality by following his hounds over Naseby's field, I think it was, while the epoch-marking battle was going on. More yet will recall that ploughman, twice referred to so dramatically by Zola, intent upon his uninterrupted day's work near Sedan, when a dynasty was reeling to its fall. So my abiding recollection, as a participant in both Antietam and Gettysburg, is, not of the fierce agony of battle at its height, but the enjoyment of two exceedingly refreshing naps. As a statement, this, I am aware, is calculated to startle rather than to excite admiration; but, to the historian, truth is sacred: and the truth is — as I have said. Neither does the statement imply any exceptional nerve or indifference to danger on my part: I make no claim to anything of the sort. It happened in this wise. In the campaigns of both Antietam and Gettysburg I was an officer in a regiment of cavalry; a mere subordinate, responsible only for obedience to orders. At Antietam, in the height of the engagement, the division to which my regiment belonged was hurried across the narrow stone bridge at the point where the little river intersects the Sharpsburg road, and deployed on its further side. We were then directly in front of Fitz-John Porter's corps, and between it and the Confederate line, covering Sharpsburg. A furious artillery duel was going on, to and fro, above our heads, between the batteries of Porter's command and those of the enemy, we being down in the valley of the river, they on the higher ground. The Confederate batteries we could not see; nor could they see us. When we first deployed on the further side of Antietam creek, it seemed as if we were doomed,—so deafening was the discharge of artillery on either side, and so incessant the hurtling of projectiles as they passed both ways over us. Every instant, too, we expected to be ordered to advance on the Confederate batteries. The situation was unmistakably trying. But no orders came; and no one was hurt. By degrees it grew monotonous. Presently, to relieve our tired horses, we were ordered to dismount, and, without breaking the ranks, we officers sat down on the sloping hill-side. No one was being struck; I was very tired; the noise was deadening; gradually it had on me a lulling effect; and so I dropped quietly asleep,—asleep in the height of the battle and between the contending armies!

They woke me up presently to look after my horse, who was grazing somewhat wide; and, after a time, we were withdrawn, and sent elsewhere. I believe that day our regiment did not lose a man, scarcely a horse. Such is my recollection of that veritable charnel-house, Antietam; — and I was a participant, — indeed in the fore-front of the battle.

Gettysburg was different; and yet, as respects somnolence, in my case much the same. During the days preceding that momentous struggle, my command had been frequently engaged, and suffered heavy loss. We who remained were but a remnant. On the 3d of July the division to which we belonged occupied the high, partially wooded ground on the right of the line, covering the army's flank and rear. It was a bright July day; hot, and with white clouds slowly rolling across the sky, premonitory of a thunder-storm during the later afternoon. From our position the eye ranged over a wide expanse of uneven country, fields broken by woods, showing nowhere any signs of an army movement, much less of conflict. A quiet, midsummer, champaign country. Neither our lines nor those of the enemy were visible to us; and the sounds of battle were hushed. Waiting for orders and for action, we dismounted, out of regard for our horses as well as ourselves, and sat or lay upon the turf. Inured to danger by contact long and close, and thoroughly tired in body as overwrought in mind, we listened for the battle to begin; and, shortly after noon, the artillery opened. We did not know it, we could see nothing in that direction, but it covered the famous advance of Pickett's Virginia division upon Meade's centre, — that wonderful, that unsurpassed feat of arms; and, just then, lulled by the incessant roar of the cannon, while the fate of the army and the nation trembled in the balance, at the very crisis of the great conflict, I dropped quietly asleep. It was not heroic; but it was, I hold, essentially war, though by no means war as imagined in the work-room of the theoretic historian. Yet, as an individual experience, to him it had its value.

But this is digression. Returning to our theme, the increased and ever still increasing requirements of the modern historian, recent experience has supplied a striking illustration of the vital importance of that special training and professional experience of which Gibbon got a glimpse as

“captain of the Hampshire grenadiers.” Every recent writer of history has, perforce, in some way had to take into consideration the bearing and influence of naval operations and supremacy on dominion. In doing so they have achieved failures, more or less considerable. At last a specialist came along, — a man trained to see things from the Ocean point of view, — one who knew a ship, and had sailed the deep. “The Influence of the Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire” then appeared, not in ten volumes, but in two; the word was spoken, and at once that all-important phase of the problem assumed, for the first time, its proper place in subordination to the whole. Captain Mahan’s remarkable work affords also other examples, both striking and suggestive, of the need of this special training in those who undertake to deal with recondite historical problems. In one case he illustrates by example what he terms “the carelessness with which naval affairs are too often described by general historians,” by “carelessness” meaning a combination of ignorance and audacity; and he then over and over calls attention to the fact that Napoleon, with his intuitive military instinct, “to the end of his career, was never able to appreciate the conditions of naval warfare.”<sup>1</sup> Thus Napoleon himself had not, nor could he acquire, what one of his acute French critics terms that “*sentiment exact des difficultés de la marine*,” the possession of which in his own case the average historical writer assumes as a matter of course. And again, the immensely interesting and curiously recondite period discussed by Mahan in his second work, the period of the Berlin and Milan decrees and of the British Order in Council, has likewise recently been treated by another American historian, to whom Mahan takes occasion once for all to acknowledge his “great indebtedness in threading the diplomatic intricacies” of the narrative.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Henry Adams wrote his account from the diplomatic point of view; as Captain Mahan has written his from the naval point of view. Both views are essential to a correct understanding of what then occurred; and yet, I submit, separately nor together, do they give a full insight into the situation. Neither Mr. Adams nor Captain Mahan had a commercial experience, or could look at the

<sup>1</sup> Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, vol. i. p. 160; *ibid.* p. 325; ii. p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 292.

problem with the trained eye of a merchant or economist. In this respect the works of both are distinctly defective; for, in those years, the whole struggle was over trade and trade channels; and, as a merchant or banker knows little of naval operations or diplomacy, how can a sailor or a diplomat know much of finance or of commerce? Yet the average historian, going back always to what he is pleased, in professional parlance, to term the original sources of history, knows it all.

But the fields are many, and heretofore the worker has been one; and, if he follows the old formulas, the general historian of the future must arrogate to himself downright omniscience. Not merely a student in his own tongue, he must be a linguist and a cosmopolitan, — a soldier, a sailor, and, like Voltaire, a Bohemian philosopher. He must, of course, be a statesman, a diplomatist, a parliamentarian, a lawyer, a physician, a theologian, an educator and a mechanic, besides being a scientist and a great traveller, with a quick insight into human nature; for there is not one of these vocations with the results of which he is not soon or late called upon to deal and to deal intelligently. Freeman goes beyond this even, and in the first of his Oxford lectures, while discussing the incidental helps to history, he concludes that, though an historical student who is also a chemist will clearly have an advantage over one who is not, yet this kind of help is so purely incidental that he could hardly counsel the ordinary historian “to make himself an accomplished chemist on the chance of the occasion.” But it is otherwise with geology, and the group of sciences which have a close connection with geology. “The physical construction of any country is no small part of its history; it is the key to not a little in the political destiny of the land and its folk.”<sup>1</sup> And yet, I remember to have had some years ago a conversation with an historian who ranked, and still ranks, high, and deservedly so, as an authority on topics connected with New England and Massachusetts, in the course of which he suddenly, and as a matter of course, made the admission that he had never been present at a town-meeting. It must have been from pure indolence; and I should not have been more surprised had a writer on surgery calmly let me understand that he had never been inside of an operating-room.

<sup>1</sup> *Methods of Historical Study* (ed. 1886), pp. 44, 45.

And this brings us to a new phase of the subject : — What will be the history of the future ? Will it be the co-operative history ? — The history prepared by many writers, each supposed to be a master of the subject of which he treats, and all those subjects welded together and fused into a narrative by a common and competent head ? I fancy not. There have, as we all know, been almost numberless attempts made in this direction, and two notable among them with which this Society was indirectly associated. But neither here nor elsewhere does the outcome of the combination of literary talent and special knowledge — the fusion of investigator and storyteller — seem to me to have been satisfactory, or to encourage repetition. The idea certainly is not new ; for, since childhood, I remember looking with wonder on a certain “ Universal History ” which filled whole shelves in the library of my grandfather, and the early pages of which inform me now that, printed in London between the years 1763 and 1766, and dedicated to “ his Grace the Duke of Marlborough,” “ Grandson to the greatest Hero of our Age,” it is compiled from “ Original Authors,” and tells the story of man from the “ Earliest Account of Time to the Present.” It is in sixty-four volumes, octavo, and seems to have occupied at least five years in its preparation : and now, I presume, it is worth just about as much as an equal bulk of cord-wood.

The difficulty with works of this sort from the beginning has been, now is, and ever will be, their uniformly uneven character, and the obvious fact that they are neither literary narratives nor philosophical disquisitions, nor yet the materials of history. Too long and cumbersome, and lacking in individuality for the general reader, the specialist looks on them with contempt ; while the student of philosophy skims through them to see if perchance anything is there. Treated in this way, Mr. Traill has recently given us “ Social England ” in six volumes, as Mr. Hubert H. Bancroft is giving us a history of the States bordering on the Pacific, which, though still incomplete, had at last accounts reached its thirty-fourth volume, in bulk dwarfing the “ Decline and Fall ” to a pigmy. But the one valuable lesson to be derived from all these combined and co-operative efforts would seem to be that no original historical work, no matter what the circumstances of its preparation, can be of lasting value unless it is the product of a single

mind. Anything else is at best a succession of monographs relating to the same general subject, of unequal value and authority; and, as such, would be almost as accessible, and probably far more thorough and valuable, in separate form.

It now seems more probable that the differentiated treatment of history will, in the not remote future, take quite another direction, — if, indeed, considerable progress in that other direction has not even now been made. In any event, the tendency is apparent. The distinction will be between the philosophical and literary narrative on the one side, and the episode and monograph on the other, — all the work of masters, and all proportioned and directed to particular ends, — literary, philosophical, or scientific. The monograph will be the basis; in fact, I cannot but consider the monograph as the foundation and corner-stone of the historical edifice of the future. I have already alluded to the bewildering multiplicity of topics and phases with which the modern historian must deal, and deal as a master. He must be a specialist in everything; and to no man is it given to combine even a dozen specialties, and be a great generalizer besides. The work calls indeed for mental aptitudes rarely if ever found in a highly developed form in one and the same organization. He who aspires to be a general historian, or to write history on a large plan, can by no possibility cover all the minutiae and infinite details of his theme. If he would avoid error, he must accept the work of others, often differently organized from himself, almost always distinctively trained. On this point, I fancy, appeal might with confidence be made to any historical investigator who has ever written a monograph in which he attempted an exhaustive study of an historical incident, it matters not what. I have myself made several such, some of which are incorporated in the Proceedings of this Society. The result has been uniformly the same. No matter who the author was, or how great or how well deserved his reputation for thoroughness and care, — George Bancroft or James Savage or John Gorham Palfrey, — when it came to applying the microscope to his narrative it seemed replete with errors, — errors of statement, errors of judgment, errors of the press. It is true that in any well-considered narrative these errors, when of detail, correct each other, and affect but in slight degree, if at all, the general conclusions or the grand

result ; but, on the other hand, there are not many either general conclusions or grand results in history which stand unchallenged. The world has not yet definitely made up its mind as to the Gracchi, or Richard III., or Mary of Scotland. The topics calling for investigation, too, tend ever to increase ; while the material for history is already overwhelming. The monograph seems to be the one possible solution of the problem.

But, just as there are histories and histories, so there are monographs and monographs ; a biography is, in one sense, always a monograph, and a monograph often assumes the dimensions of a history. Investigators of to-day are apt, for one reason or another, to select periods or phases of development, and devote the study of years if not of their lives to them. In this way, indeed, some of the best historical work is now done. Naming only recent English examples, take Freeman's *Norman Conquest*, Froude's *Reigns of the Tudors*, Gardiner's *War of the Rebellion*, May's *Constitutional History*, and Mahan's *Sea Power*, to mention no others, these works all relate to episodes, or comparatively brief phases of historical development. They, too, are in a way monographs. On the other hand, the general historian is bringing the scope and execution of his work within the limits of human life and patience. Mommsen deals with the Roman Republic, Green treats of the English people, each in four volumes of not immoderate size ; while Goldwin Smith has endeavored to condense all that needs to be said about the United States in three hundred octavo pages. This tendency it now seems probable will continue and develop. The historian of the future will thus profit by the example of Macaulay in more ways than one ; and, while pursuing his methods, will avoid the fatal errors into which the great raconteur fell. In other words, bearing in mind the unity of history as a whole, and the consequent subordination of its parts, he will produce his results through a combination of the broad and general treatment with the monographic and special treatment, — he will not write history on a large scale as if it were a monogram, nor will he, on the other hand, develop the monogram by degrees into the resemblance of a history. For instance, recurring again to the example of Macaulay, — at once a model and a beacon of danger, — much of his best, most popular and

most enduring work was done in the form of special studies, — if not exactly monographs, yet in the nature of monographs. It is through him that the average English reader of to-day knows almost all he does know of Clive and of Hastings, and much of what little he knows of Bacon, Dryden, Addison, Johnson, Chatham, Pitt and Frederick the Great. Barère would be forgotten but for him. These were all, so far as Macaulay himself was concerned, preliminary studies for his more comprehensive work; but, when he came to the comprehensive work, he attempted it with the detail of a monograph. His method was thus good; unfortunately he had not thought the problem out, and politics and India interfered with his execution. So the night came for him with a task, impossible to finish, scarcely begun. The historian of the future seems now likely to pursue a different method. Recognizing the fact that he probably is not at once a litterateur, a soldier, a statesman, a lawyer, a theologian, a physician and a biologist, that he certainly will not live forever, that he has not the cosmogony at his fingers' ends, and that to ransack every repository of information on all possible subjects transcends the powers of even the most industrious, — recognizing in this degree the limits of possibility, he will be content to avail himself of the labors of others, better advised on many subjects than himself, and, becoming the student of monographs, derive the great body of his information, not, as the expression now goes, from "original sources," or even from personal observation, but, as we all in the end must, at second hand. His insight will be largely into the knowledge and judgment of others, and the degree of reliance to be placed in them. He will then approach his task piecemeal and from different points of view; not fling himself on it altogether and at once. He will himself become the writer of monographs, — put forth elaborate, preliminary, tentative studies. He will thus for a long time soak and tan, as it were, in the learning and literature of his subject, — approaching it now from this direction and now from that, studying it in its parts and in its connection with the whole, seeing it through many eyes and under the sway of differing judgments, patiently endeavoring to extract from it its most hidden secrets and to get at the true inwardness of its soul of souls; then, at last, throwing all his finished monographs, his preliminary studies, and his matured judg-

ments into the crucible, he will analyze, refine and condense, in the end pouring out the concentrated result, not in thirty volumes, but in two. So far as that writer and that subject are concerned, we will then have the doubly distilled philosophy of history, and a veritable contribution to the general scheme. He will have squeezed into his solution not only the essence of his own knowledge and thought, but the essence of all the thought and all the knowledge that others also have given to it. He will then have done what Thucydides and Tacitus and Gibbon — still, when all is said and done, the smaller Pleiad of the historical firmament — did in part before, and yet alone have done. Combining the historical instinct with a highly developed literary faculty, he will seek to produce in the blaze of modern scientific light and following modern methods, not a brilliant fragment, or a bloated monograph, nor yet an unimaginative book of dry annals, nor, again, a library in itself, but a masterpiece, compact, self-centred and philosophical, — like Shakespeare's man "looking before and after."

If, then, I have rightly divined those historical methods which will be in vogue in the twentieth century, — methods in history based, as in science they are already based, on specialism and division of labor, — methods, like an edifice, having the monograph for a base, the episode for walls, and the philosophy of history for a dome, — it remains to consider what part in the economy of such methods belongs to a society such as ours. Has it a distinct function? — And, if it has, is that function of importance? I have often — more frequently too of late than formerly — heard it intimated that the day of usefulness of historical societies, even of this Society in particular, was over; that it had done its work and was now effete, — little more, indeed, than one of the world's cast-off garments, rich in material and strong in texture, it is true, but quaint, old-fashioned and outgrown; meet only for that wallet time bears upon its back

"Wherein he puts alms for oblivion.

. . . To have done is to hang

Quite out of fashion, like a rusty mail

In monumental mockery."

And is this to be our destiny here? Are we an organization the function of which has been fulfilled? Must this So-

ciety hang here, on Boston's outward wall, "like a rusty mail in monumental mockery"? Distinctly, I do not think so; and that I do not think so is shown by the fact that I am here to-day. That the Massachusetts Historical Society has served, and well served, the somewhat narrow, if extremely useful, purposes for which the founders designed it, I both claim and admit. In this respect my only regret is that it was not organized a whole century earlier, — in 1691, instead of in 1791. It was at first designed to be a repository, a species of general receptacle of original material for history, — material very liable without some such receptacle, as experience had shown, to be scattered and lost. The Mather, the Prince, and the Hutchinson collections, and their fate, were fresh in the memories of Jeremy Belknap and his seven associates. In 1691 Increase Mather was fifty-two years old, and his son, the more famous Cotton, although but twenty-eight, had already been seven years an ordained minister. Samuel Sewall was nearly forty. Joseph Dudley was forty-four. Behind them stood Thomas Prince, a child of only four, but preparing to assume the work when the others should lay it down. It is sad to think what we of the sixth subsequent generation have lost, because it did not occur to Increase Mather in 1691 to do that which Jeremy Belknap did a century later. Involving as it did the Mather, the Prince, and the Hutchinson collections, that loss is *valde deflendum*.

Nevertheless, though much was taken, much is left; and during fifty years this Society performed a most useful function which, but for it, would have remained unperformed, and the world now been perceptibly poorer thereby. That work, however, is done, — unquestionably done; and so far as it, or work of similar character, is concerned, ample provision for the future has elsewhere been made. There is, accordingly, no question this Society might to-morrow be swept out of existence and, provided its accumulations did not go with it, no scholar or investigator would be appreciably the worse. The past is secure. But, on the other hand, the world is not yet finished, nor indeed, so far as is yet apparent, does it even approximate the finished condition; and there are many functions of usefulness to fill, in connection with history and historical methods, as in connection with most other things, the essential point being always to bear freshly in mind the

adage to "keep your light so shining a little in front of the next." We must adapt ourselves and our methods to the new conditions and the new methods. How is this to be done? Through what reorganization? Through what infusion of new life?

If I am correct in my theory,—my diagnosis of the situation,—if now in history, as already in other branches of scientific investigation, specialism, differentiation and combination are to be the distinguishing features of successful working,—if the monograph is to play a part of ever-increasing importance, then the future field of work and of usefulness of this Society becomes at once clear, and is to be measured only by its means; there is for it a field of development unlimited. An historical society such as ours acts, it is to be remembered, in two ways, performs two functions,—it is a recognized receptacle, a repository, and also an agency of publication. As a repository it, too, must specialize, differentiate. The accumulation of historical matter, it is to be remembered, progresses with ever-increasing rapidity. The word is a strong one, but to me the future is in this respect appalling to contemplate. We are to be bankrupted by our possessions. When Jeremy Belknap and his associates met to form this Society, there was, I believe, but one public library in Massachusetts,—that of Harvard College,—and it contained about 12,000 volumes. Now, one hundred and eight years later, that library contains 370,000 volumes, besides an equal number of pamphlets; while another, municipal library, having in the mean while grown up within three miles of it, already overshadows it with 700,000 volumes. Our Society has a modest collection of 40,000 books, to which must be added nearly 100,000 pamphlets; but ours is only one out of over a score of collections relating to specialties,—history, law, medicine, science, theology,—almost every one of which now numbers more volumes than Harvard College could boast in 1791. Indeed, it is speaking within safe bounds to say that the public collections of the Commonwealth to-day contain over two and a half millions of volumes and a million of pamphlets, accumulated during the lifetime of our organization. The progression has been, and is, geometric. At the same rate the accumulation of the twentieth century defies computation in advance,—it will altogether defy any nice classification or ex-

haustive cataloguing. The problem of the future, therefore, is not accumulation; that is provided for. It will go on surely, and only too fast. The question of the future, so far as the material of history is concerned, relates to getting at what has been accumulated, — the ready extraction of the marrow. In other words, it is a problem of differentiation, selection, arrangement, indexing and cataloguing. To-day we are like men wandering in a vast wilderness, which is springing up in every direction with tropical luxuriance. The one great necessity is to have paths carried through it on some intelligible plan, which will at once enable us to find our way whither we would go, or tell us in what directions further research would be futile. More than this, even, the field within which the particular library is to be developed, must be defined, and its limits respected. Within those limits the collection should be made as nearly complete as circumstances will permit, and its indexing, while reduced to a system, must be elevated into a science.

Fortunately for us, so far as the work of collection is concerned, the future field for usefulness of this Society is in great degree marked out for it in advance. In the process of differentiation ours should be the Massachusetts historical library, just as in this vicinity there is a specialized law library, theological library, medical library and scientific library, — just as there will ultimately be libraries specially devoted to the collection of public documents, of periodicals and of newspapers. But our collection should include more especially the material for history and the monograph, — the Massachusetts history and the Massachusetts monograph; the standard historical work can be found in every public and in most private libraries; it should be a subordinate feature in ours. Ours is an investigator's collection, not a general reader's or a student's or a working library; it is the resort of the specialist, and the specialist on what is again a differentiated branch of a great subject, — the history of America, of New England, above all of Massachusetts. And were we to confine ourselves to Massachusetts alone, I fear the accumulation would put severe stress on our power to receive and to assimilate. It would not be profitable to enter into any computation; but one suggestion alone would in this connection furnish food enough for thought, — the annual accu-

mulation of single copies of all the newspapers and periodicals and public documents published in Massachusetts would, I apprehend, swamp us hopelessly within a lifetime.

The day of indiscriminate, unsystematic accumulation is, therefore, past; no receptacle will suffice for it, no power of assimilation is equal to the work of ordering and digesting it. It only remains for us, as for others, selecting our field, to labor in it intelligently as well as strenuously, so as in it to attain and hold a position of recognized superiority. If we would not fail in our mission, we must then make this building a place where the investigator in certain specific branches of history will be more likely than elsewhere to find what he wants, and to find it readily.

So much for the first of our functions. But our Society has always published as well as collected. We now already boast over ninety printed volumes, the fruit of the century that is ending. But publishing implies another branch of collection, the collection of material for publication. This building should in the future be a species of recognized manuscript clearing-house. It should be the business of those connected with it to receive, sort and examine, and destroy or preserve, as the case may be, — more frequently, I hope, to destroy than preserve, — unprinted material; and to collect such it should be ever on the watch. A diary — the daily record of a commonplace life by a commonplace human being — is probably as dreary and unprofitable a record as can be contemplated by any eyes except those of him or her who writes; and to those eyes it is apt to be unbearable. Hating to keep, we lack the courage to destroy. But, two centuries ago, Samuel Pepys kept a diary; and to-day in some mysterious chest in an unsuspected attic of Boston there may be, there probably is, hidden away some scarcely less curious record. Possibly it is in process of daily formation now. If so, it is our function in some way and at some time to secure it; and, if we fail to do so, in so far we miss our destiny.

But of late, unconsciously to ourselves, the work of the Society has been assuming another direction, — a direction stimulated by the new historical methods and in close sympathy with them. For the first sixty-three years of its existence our predecessors confined their efforts to accumulation, and to the publication of the series of its so-called "Collections," which,

in 1856, numbered thirty-three volumes, culminating most happily in Deane's edition of Bradford's "History of Plymouth Plantation." It then began a new series, that of its Proceedings, which now numbers thirty volumes; and these volumes of Proceedings are largely made up of monographs, and scraps of original material of history thus placed on file, and, by the help of our indexes, made conveniently accessible. In this way we have already drifted imperceptibly into a channel of usefulness which admits of indefinite deepening and broadening. The Society should become the patron of the historical monograph, — it should produce them, collect them, and preserve traces of them. Of such our volumes of Proceedings may be, and should be, a file and an index; while our catalogues and our calendars should lay open the contents of our unpublished manuscript collections. To accumulate was our special function in the nineteenth century; our function in the twentieth will be to make all accumulations available.

Having thus moved round the circle, we have now come back to the point from which we set out, — or rather not, perhaps, to the point from which we set out, but a point similar to that from which the founders set out one hundred and eight years ago. Again the vision of Lord Bathurst! As the founders stood at the close of a century, so we now. They then, doubtless, tried to peer behind the curtain which shrouded from them what has since become our past, and, failing so to do, sought in some degree to fathom the mysteries that curtain veiled. In so far as they did thus attempt we can be sure of one thing only; they failed, and they failed utterly, to form a conception even of the dramatic actualities, — the splendors and the horrors that future had in store. They dreamed as little that we, their successors, would, at the close of the century about to open, be here amid the marshes of the Back Bay, as they did that their coming century would see enacted in its earlier years the most brilliant drama and the most dreadful tragedy the eye of man has ever gazed on. So with us. Educated by the developments of the nineteenth century to appreciate every possibility of the twentieth, we strain our imaginations as we try to picture to ourselves that which it may have in store, not for us, but for the successors of the founders in the seventh generation. Of one thing only may

we too rest assured, — it is the unexpected which will occur. In that uncertainty, our Society, as we and our descendants, must take its chance. But, in addressing ourselves to the problems immediately before us, — in taking the century plunge we so soon must take, — we can hardly dare hope that, in making up the verdict, our offspring in the fourth generation will pronounce the work the doing which we now have in hand not less well done nor less fruitful of results than was the work the founders and our fathers did, when, falling from their hands, we took it up. Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall ; let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.





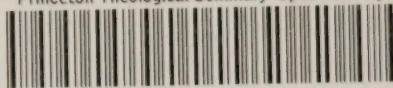


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